

Spring 2006

## Namaste 2006

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# Namaste

A student's human rights journal  
2006

University of Connecticut



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### **NAMASTE** – A history

Namaste (nah-mah-STAY) is a Hindi word meaning, the Spirit in me meets the same Spirit in you. It is a South Asian greeting, originating in India that is used for hello and goodbye. The greeting is commonly accompanied by a slight bow made with the hands pressed together, palms touching, in front of the chest. This is a well-recognized symbolic gesture in which one hand represents the higher, spiritual nature, while the other represents the worldly self. By combining the two, the person making the gesture is attempting to rise above their differences with others, and connect themselves to the person he/she bows to. The bow is symbolic of love and respect.

This journal is meant to promote the study of human rights at the University of Connecticut and is to serve as a venue for recognizing and displaying great academic achievements of both undergraduate and graduate students in this field of study.

Recognizing the work being done within the human rights community at UConn will foster an environment that promotes mutual respect. More than that, it is hoped that this ideal will be embraced by university community members and translated in various ways and works to the larger global community.

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## **FOREWORD**

This inaugural issue of *Namaste*, which is edited and produced entirely by undergraduate students at the University of Connecticut, is made possible by a grant from the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center in honor of the 10th anniversary of its founding at the University of Connecticut. The dedication of the Center in October 1995 began a process that over the next ten years has established the University of Connecticut as an internationally known center for human rights scholarship, education, and outreach. As part of its academic program in human rights, the University established an undergraduate human rights minor which continues to attract a growing number of students.

In conjunction with other 10th anniversary celebratory events, several University faculty organized a Human Rights Essay and Creative Writing Contest for undergraduate students. The work of the student winners is featured in this volume. It is fitting that the celebratory events of a Research Center dedicated to preserving the archives of those who have fought for human rights in the past include a tribute to the work of the next generation of individuals who will fight for global justice. It has been gratifying to witness the enthusiasm, initiative, and dedication of the student editors and producers of this volume. They are busy putting ideas into action.

With great hope for the future,  
Anne L. Hiskes  
Associate Professor of Philosophy

Storrs, Connecticut  
April 2, 2006



J. MICHAEL TOWER

Palestinian female suicide bombers:  
a new nationalism, a new feminism,  
or a new exploitation  
(December 2005)





#### ABOUT MICHAEL

Michael is an undergraduate at the University of Connecticut studying Women's Studies and Sociology, class of 2006. Michael's research interests center around women's access to institutions of power and masculinity studies. He was a One Year Visiting Student in the sociology department at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland when he wrote the essay included in this volume. Michael will be attending Social Work graduate school in the fall of 2006.

The emergence of Palestinian female suicide bombers radically redefined the role of women in the nationalist struggle for Palestinian statehood and the fight for women's equality. Is women's martyrdom the paradigm for gender equality and women's commitment to the nationalist struggle, as Islamic fundamentalists allege? To assess the claim, this essay places the rise of the Palestinian female suicide bomber within a 30 – year history of grassroots activism by Women's Committees, gender relations in the first and second intifada, and growth of the Islamic fundamentalist movement at the end of the 20th century. These elements are linked to the life circumstances behind each martyrdom to reveal the external influences and internal motivations behind each woman's choice to commit suicide. This historical analysis reveals a coercive patriarchal influence involved in the promotion of women's martyrdom and casts severe doubt on the liberatory nature of Palestinian female suicide bombers.



Wafa Idris slept in on Sunday, January 27th, 2002. Buying her niece a glass of fruit juice on her way out of her Palestinian hometown, she headed to Jerusalem layered in explosives. Dressed in a Western style coat with long flowing hair and manicured nails, she looked like just another tourist shopping for shoes in east Jerusalem. In a flash of light and explosion of flesh, Idris began a new chapter in women's historical fight for social liberation in the Palestinian state. Since then a heroic appreciation of female suicide bombers emerged in certain segments of the Palestinian population. To discuss the implications of this on women's liberation and national liberation, I will trace the efforts and strategies of the women's movement over the past 30 years by concentrating on patriarchal institutional involvement and grassroots activism. I will further discuss how the ideology of the female suicide bomber is constructed by fundamentalists as both socially and nationally liberationist for the women involved. I will conclude by discussing how the mechanisms behind women's martyrdom actually reinforce traditional gender hierarchies and hinder the development of social liberation for women of Palestine.

#### **WOMEN'S COMMITTEES OF THE 1970's AND 80's**

The first women's committee, the Women's Work Committee (WWC) was established following the International Women's Day conference in 1978. Women had been active in the nationalist struggle for years, but the formation of the WWC refocused women's activism to their own gender oppression within their occupied territories. As its mission stated, the WWC sought "improvement in women's political, economic, social, and cultural status as part of the process of liberation from all forms of exploitation."<sup>1</sup> The activist women recognized that women's lives would improve little if Israeli oppressive force were simply replaced by patriarchal tyranny under a Palestinian state. The educated, upper class women who constituted the WWC early groups made efforts to transcend their class privilege. They began by focusing on the development programs for the vast majority of Palestinian women who lived in villages and refugee camps with the most severe gender oppression. In the early 1980's, the WWC fractured into four distinct committees, each corresponding to a faction within the PLO, or Palestinian Liberation Organization.

The fragmentation of the women's movement was a mixed result for the development of a women's consciousness in Palestine. While more women's committees enabled greater outreach and education to the population, ideological differences created a schism among the

**MALERIE SCHWARTZ** Self-portrait  
gelatin silver print, 2005



committees. The primary issue that caused strife was in many ways the most important these groups dealt with: should women's liberation be a constant feature of national liberation, or should nationalist interests supercede the fight for gender equality?

The four major women's committees were not indifferent to these fundamental approaches in the functioning of their organizations. Two groups believed women's liberation must go hand in hand with national liberation, another believed that gender issues need to take a back seat to nationalist priorities, and yet another believed that social equality would inevitably accompany national liberation on its own. These and other ideological differences often placed women's groups with oppositional attitudes toward one another. Committees wasted precious resources competing against each other to establish day care centers in the same community. Some observers of the women's committees in the early 1980's argue that the leaders of the four women's committees seemed to have more in common with the men in their respective PLO factions than with each other. In spite of the divisions among the groups, the committees achieved significant success promoting women's liberation in the years leading up to the first Intifada.

Each women's committee mobilized outreach efforts to assist rural women bound by domesticity and urban women encountering wage, vacation, and other issues. Conceptually, social liberation gained distinction from national liberation as the achievement of "women's spaces" in the committees spurred initial discussions for women to explore their gender oppression. Interventions within rural communities enabled women to achieve a degree of self-sufficiency and accomplishment outside the home. However, the real achievement of the women's committees was more fundamental.

The women's committees in the 1980's managed an important balance between grassroots involvement and inclusion with patriarchal decision-making organizations such as the PLO. Women's groups never wholly depended on the institutions of the patriarchy for accomplishing steps towards women's liberation. While the committees were tied to the PLO at the higher levels, women developed and implemented their own strategies. Women themselves created the operational models for their committee structure, conducted their own research into rural women's needs, and formulated outreach programs on their own terms. Committee leaders and rural women who participated in the training programs took their

new skills and operational knowledge to the nationalist struggle in December 1987, with the first intifada.

#### PALESTINIAN WOMEN IN THE FIRST INTIFADA

Responding to decades of abuse by the Israeli military, Palestinian society mobilized a spontaneous, massive resistance movement with the intifada of 1987. Palestinian women stepped into the nationalist domain, joining men in protesting, violating curfews and closures, and physically confronting Israeli armed forces. Women's committees stepped to the fore, using their years of organizational experience to coordinate demonstrations, continue the education of children, and cultivating crops no longer available during the boycott of Israeli goods. "Behold our women," one revolutionary booklet proclaimed, "a fighting force comparable to that of our men." With their husbands imprisoned or confined by curfews, women assumed responsibility for heading up households, running family businesses, and other roles traditionally limited to patriarchal privilege. The freedoms many women experienced in the early intifada helped them to understand that without social liberation, national liberation would be meaningless in the lives of Palestinian women. This tragic instance of women being heaved back into the domestic sphere following a hard fought struggle for nationhood, made Palestinian women promise themselves not to become "another Algeria."

Chaotic social upheavals, such as the Intifada, often destabilize gender roles in order to mount an effective resistance movement. However, once the initial period of excitement passes, societies typically return to familiar hierarchies to reassert order and stability into their lives once more. Rema Hammami argues that the emergence of popular committees months after the beginning of the first Intifada initiated this return of women into the domestic sphere. Another source of public exclusion for women came from the growing influence of Islamicists in Palestine.

The Islamic Fundamentalist Movement in the Early Intifada  
Several months after the intifada began, attitudes in the streets of the Occupied Territories shifted as Palestinians realized that in spite of the intense struggle and personal sacrifice made by virtually all in the collective resistance, little concrete advancement was made towards the nationalist goal. Fundamentalist voices blamed the inefficacy of the intifada on a loss of religious principles. Hamas and others offered religious fundamentalism as the solution to achieving the nationalist goal. More importantly, Hamas offered Gaza the

region suffering the most brutality, personal hardship, health care and other services in exchange for religious adherence. Fundamentalism quickly gained popularity in Gaza, and traditional gender roles were reasserted as Hamas ordered women to veil and men to retake the sole responsibility of the public nationalist struggle. Prior to the veiling requirement, many Palestinian women veiled out of personal choice. However, coercive veiling enforced by Hamas attacks represented a significant backlash against the autonomy of women. Neither the newly formed Women's Higher Council (WHC), a representative body of all women's committees, nor the individual committees themselves, dealt effectively with the danger imposed by early fundamentalist impositions on women. In fact there was little political opposition to the fundamentalist uprising, fearing that factionalism within the Palestinian resistance movement was just what Israel hoped for. As a result, voices promoting the importance of women's equality and national liberation were effectively silenced.

It should be noted that women's committees never politically established women's role in the early Intifada, which was a significant opportunity to reorder gender roles. Women's participation before and after the fundamentalist backlash of the first intifada was consistently within the proscribed boundaries of patriarchal institutions. This caused women to never directly challenge the system promoting women's subservience. Additionally, the WHC did little to create a unified women's agenda in the face of an increasingly hostile fundamentalist environment. Also many other women's committees were complicit in allowing social liberation to take a back seat to the nationalist struggle.

Women's progressive role in the early Intifada never achieved a systematic reconceptualization of gender in Palestinian society. However, many scholars argue that the women's violent exclusion and sudden return to domesticity highlighted the disadvantages attendant to traditional Palestinian womanhood, and a broad based women's consciousness, a Palestinian feminism, finally emerged.

#### **WOMEN'S CENTERS: NON-PATRIARCHAL ROUTES TO SOCIAL LIBERATION**

During the fundamentalist backlash of the 1990's, Palestinian women began to work outside of patriarchal power structures for the nationalist cause, developing the tools for social liberation in anticipation of new Palestinian state. The four women's committees continued to work separately in the villages and urban areas of the Occupied Territories. They helped organize women into co-op-



eratives, producing foodstuffs, clothing, and other goods usually bought from Israelis. Women developed useful skills and a degree of economic independence through their participation in production co-ops. Concurrently, the women's movement continued to establish alternative means of achieving equality through the creation of women's centers throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The women's centers provided space for women to network, understand their oppression, and formulate strategies to undermine it. The first of the centers, the Women's Affairs Center, concentrated on providing job training (literacy, vocational instruction, computer training) and research into Palestinian gender oppression. Other centers concentrated on consciousness-raising efforts, such as holding lectures on violence against women, women's health, and women in social change. These centers were prevalent in towns throughout the Occupied Territories and provided safe spaces for women to plan for their social liberation. The Bisan Center for Research and Development, founded in 1990, began to address some of the classist structural issues in the women's movement by "bridging the gap between women active in the grassroots movement and the female academics and professionals." Feminist thought reached greater populations and the women's movement broadened as rural women interacted with urban professionals and academic formulating strategies for gender liberation.

As women's voices were strengthened by the establishment of the centers, Palestinian leaders objected to women raising "peripheral" gender issues during a time of nationalist struggle. Women committees and centers persisted by using workshops and lectures to engage the public with issues of domestic violence. Also they provided hotlines and shelters to help women confront their oppression. These and other initiatives drove gender issues into the public discourse, working towards the "empowerment of women through gender awareness." Women's centers and committees continued to work outside the bounds of the patriarchy until 1994 with the signing of the Oslo Accords.

#### **SHIFTING PRIORITIES: PATRIARCHAL INCLUSION AND LOSING TOUCH WITH THE GRASS ROOTS**

In 1994, Palestinian leaders gathered together to form the framework for the Palestinian Authority and draft the Basic Law to act as a temporary constitution until a permanent state was formed. Women activists secured the creation of the Women's Affairs Technical Com-

**ALYSSA ALLABEN** Woman  
digital photograph, 2005



mittee, a quasi-governmental organization responsible for drafting a Women's Bill of Rights for use in the eventual creation of a Palestinian state. Members of the women's committees, the General Union of Palestinian Women, and independent feminists were included in discussions to give the document a broad base of support. The Women's Bill of Rights grounded its authority in the United Nations Convention to End Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), achieving a distinctly feminist quality. However, this concentration on institutional participation led women's groups to abandon grass roots involvement.

During this formative stage of the Palestinian statehood, women attempted to establish a strong presence as a model for future gender-inclusive operations. It was vitally important for women to assert their voices, however, during the process, women's committees lost their connection to the grassroots and became enwrapped in the restraints of patriarchy. Co-ops in small communities disbanded, literacy programs lost funding, and women's centers withdrew support for child-care centers. Activist women became more concerned with processes of patriarchal inclusion and representation than with the continued programmatic support of women throughout the Occupied Territories.

In the 1980's and early 90's, women's committees traditionally provided a lot of the charitable support in hard hit regions like the Gaza Strip. They provided medical care while administering food production/distribution programs to relieve the desperation caused by the Israeli Occupation and the turmoil of the intifada. Having drastic consequences, as women's committee's ceased their community involvement, fundamentalist groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad stepped into the vacuum. Funded by Syria and Iran, Islamicists used charity to win the hearts and minds of Palestinians. Fundamentalism became not only a way to provide for one's family, but religiosity became a sacred form of political resistance and an expression of nationalism. Within this context came the rise of the female suicide bomber in 2002.

#### **THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND THE FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBER**

Following the suicide bombing death of Wafa Idris, fundamentalist organizations seized upon the idea that women should again take up the nationalist struggle through direct, violent means. Sheik Hassan, spiritual guide to Hamas, offered a unique religious reward to encourage women to take part in suicide bombing:

If they are not married they are guaranteed a pure husband in Paradise, and of course they are entitled to bring seventy of their relatives to join them there without suffering the anguish of death. Fundamentalists were offering women a privilege they had previously stripped from them in the early intifada – membership in the nationalistic struggle. The Palestinian leadership reinforced the nationalist implications of female martyrdom. One of them eulogizing Idris, declared, “Wafa’s martyrdom restored honor to the national role of the Palestinian woman, sketched the most wonderful pictures of heroism in the long battle for national liberation.” Using women as a symbol of the nation, Islamicists called up on women to assert their nationalism through violent action. Images of the heroic female martyr permeated the media, constructing martyrdom and acts of violence by women as proof of their commitment to securing Palestinian statehood. Just as the rise of an ideology of female martyrs was nationalistic in purpose, it was constructed as socially liberating as well.

In a strange twist of circumstance, fundamentalists offer the reward that women’s groups have been fighting a century for – social liberation. Or at least their definition of it. Since the early backlash in the first Intifada, fundamentalist groups have been responsible for reproducing the subjugation of women to the men in their lives. Ironically, the ideology of the female suicide bomber constructed by the same Islamicists, capitalizes on women’s desire to be free from this subordination. The persuasiveness of these arguments is revealed in the attitudes of some Palestinian women. According to one woman who failed in her bombing attempt, women’s martyrdom is “definitely a step forward for equality for women throughout the Arab world” because if women are able to fight and die like men, that indicates significant progress toward gender equality. With women’s groups no longer doing much activist work in towns and villages, fundamentalists have taken their place and constructed martyrdom, instead of self-sufficiency, as the route to gender equality. In order to understand the truly deceptive nature of the fundamentalists’ “gender equality,” few key circumstances that motivate women to become martyrs, should be taken into account

#### **THE MECHANISMS BEHIND WOMEN’S MARTYRDOM**

Militant groups target Palestinian women who are particularly vulnerable in their personal lives. Wafa Idris, her mother explains, found herself in such a situation. “My daughter’s husband divorced her because she couldn’t have children. Wafa knew she could never marry

again because a divorced woman is tainted...She was young, intelligent, and beautiful and had nothing to live for." (emphasis added) Reading the biographical notes on other women suicide bombers, one consistently finds evidence of gender related baggage. These women are even raped to make them vulnerable. In every case of suicide bombing, a father, brother, uncle, or close family friend – always male – has played a central role in convincing the women that suicide is the only honorable recourse. Women martyrs are not spontaneous expressions of nationalist rage – they are the result of calculated, managed recruitment efforts by fundamentalists to use downtrodden women as military weapons.

In conclusion, women's martyrdom is the latest redefinition of women's role and reflects negatively on women's status in the social and nationalistic landscape in Palestine. Women martyrs, and fundamentalists groups creating them, attempted to insert themselves into the void of women's groups who are losing touch with the grass roots in Gaza. Fundamentalists have attempted to assert their own version of "feminism," to serve their own military interests. A true Palestinian gender equality demands self-determination for women, not the freedom to do "manly" things. Fundamentalists have only established another set of standards by which Muslim women are to be judged and punished. Basically, as long as fundamentalist men have the power to define feminism and "equality" for women, Palestine will never achieve true gender equality.

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MEGAN MCDONALD

Claiming their rights: a social movement by and  
for children





#### **ABOUT MEGAN**

Megan McDonald graduated cum laude from UCONN in May of 2005 with a degree in Political Science and a minor in Human Rights. She interned at the Human Rights Institute and at Lawyers without Borders and worked at the Office of the Attorney General. She was Vice President of Amnesty International, Vice President of Lawyers without Borders Student Division, House Manager of the V-Day Campaign and a UNESCO Student Ambassador for Human Rights. She was also a member of Pi Sigma Alpha, the political science honor society.

Currently, Megan is a first year student at Pace University School of Law and is pursuing Children's Rights law. At Pace, she is involved in numerous organizations. She is co-chair of the Public Interest Law Scholarship Organization's Silent Auction Committee, Treasurer of the Women's Association of Law Students and a member of Phi Alpha Delta.

This paper was awarded second place in the Dodd Center Human Rights Writing Competition and the Economic Rights Poster Contest.



**MELISSA H. SHIPPEE** Two random events (detail)  
drawing, 2006

The concept of human rights is a highly contentious aspect of international politics. The focus has historically been on human rights as a whole, but in recent years children's rights have entered the spotlight. In 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was finalized. Soon after coming into force in 1990, it became the most ratified convention in United Nations' history. The document protects children from a multitude of harms by outlining the specific rights to which children are entitled. Among these rights are the right to education (Article 28 states that primary education must be compulsory and free for all) and the right to protection from child labor (Article 32 states that there should be a minimum age for employment). Following this triumph of the children's rights movement, another movement emerged--one directly contradicting (wording?) many of the rights outlined in the CRC itself, yet using Article 12 as a main point of argument. Article 12 states that children have a right to express their views about matters that affect them. This new movement is a movement not only for children but by children.

A social movement is composed of three main elements. First, there must be a political opportunity structure, or a critical opening which allows a trigger for change. This opportunity certainly opened for working children with the advent of the children's rights movement. The CRC and the ensuing focus on children's rights allowed the working children to have a place in the discussion about their rights. The African Movement of Working Children and Youth (AMWCY) formally established themselves in 1994. The second main element necessary for a social movement to emerge is a mobilizing structure, or a network of people put into action to create change. Remarkably, the children created this structure almost entirely on their own. Though grassroots groups of working children began to form in different areas, they remained in communication through conferences and other events. Finally, framing--the act of naming wrongs and claiming rights--is central to social movement evolution. These children have achieved this aspect of social movement development in a most powerful manner: With reference to documents that are supposed to protect them, the working children have carefully outlined aspects that they argue infringe on their rights and do more harm than good. Further, they have outlined precisely what rights they feel they are entitled to and specified which forms of labor are acceptable to them. Through integration of these three crucial elements, the working children have emerged as a valid social movement.

The Working Children's Movement spread to several areas where

child labor is the reality of life for many children who are economically tied to the practice, and who resent adults telling them that they cannot work, when they need to. Children from Africa, India, and Latin America challenged the creators of the CRC and other children's rights documents, demanding their voices be heard when it comes to decisions made on their behalf. They maintain that their right to work should not be limited by adults, especially when their own opinions are not taken into account. This movement by children has caused many children's rights advocates to reexamine their own ideas about child labor, causing controversy within the children's rights movement at large.

The Working Children's Movement can be traced to the establishment of the AMWCY in 1994, when the founders of the movement not only identified 12 rights to help them eliminate exploitation and the worst forms of child labor, but also set up a plan for promoting those rights. The rights include the right to learn a trade and participate in light and limited work. Children involved in this movement concentrated on their own experiences in determining the most important protections that they needed, some that are ignored completely by adult "advocates". Taking the development of these rights into their own hands demonstrated that the children were in fact quite serious about being heard as a movement.

The movement further progressed in 1997 in Oslo, when four young activists walked out of an international NGO meeting connected to the World Summit on Child Labor wearing gags on their mouths to demonstrate the way they felt the adults viewed them. These young activists believed that the adults in the meeting were ignoring their thoughts and not letting them speak. Greeted by the press outside of the meeting, they presented their agenda to improve conditions for working children.

One of these activists was a representative of the "Movement of Working Boys, Girls and Adolescents of Nicaragua (NATRAS) -- an advocacy organization that provides support services for working children." This organization is funded through Save the Children Canada and has been credited with developing special curricula designed with working children in mind. One organization affiliated with NATRAS, La Fundacion "La Verde Sonrisa", stated its goal to provide education for children that includes not only academics, but skill training in areas such as carpentry and baking as well. Programs like these demonstrate that while the children need to work, they

also want to go to school, provided they learn beneficial skills.

This revolutionary children's rights movement spread to many other countries in addition to Nicaragua. A much larger group formed in Latin America and the Caribbean at large, calling itself the Latin American and Caribbean Movement of Working Children and Adolescent, or MOLACNATS. This movement exists in approximately fifteen countries. In addition to the Latin American movement, multiple movements exist in India. The Indian Working Children's Movement is composed of ten working children's organizations from central and southern India. A Working Children's Syndicate is being formed in the northern part of India, where an organization known as Ballah Mazdoor organizes independent working children typically threatened by the dangers of the streets. Clearly, the working children's movement is not one that can be ignored, nor is it going away. These individual movements from country to country are all bound together tightly and remain in communication with each other. For many, this solidarity began in 1996 when an international meeting took place in Kundapur, India.

The first International Meeting of Working Children, held in India in 1996, consisted of twenty-nine working child delegates from Asia, Latin America and Africa and produced ten points of consensus, referred to as The Kundapur Declaration. Within the declaration, the children outlined the points they considered most important to the core of the movement, including that they "are against the boycott of products made by children, want an education system that is adapted to [their] reality and capabilities [and] are against exploitation at work but...are for work with dignity with hours adapted so that [they] have time for education and leisure". These points utilized some articles from the CRC, such as the articles granting time for leisure and education, but made an important distinction about work. The children made it clear that, while they would not be exploited, they had the right to work and earn a living.

They also determined that they, the Working Children and Youth Movements, must always be consulted about decisions concerning child work. To facilitate cooperation and reinforce their solidarity, they later created an International Co-ordination of Working Children Movements. As a group, they have participated in numerous conferences on child labor and children's rights, which significantly increased their power and visibility. The meeting at Oslo, which sparked international attention following the walk out by gagged child

delegates, is just one example of how this movement has increased attention towards its goals.

In 2000, at the 5th Meeting of the AMWCY, the Working Children's Movement achieved yet another success when they participated in a debate with the Regional Director of UNICEF. This debate led her to agree to "support the AMWCY, within the limits of available means and of her mandate". Support from UNICEF demonstrated just how far the children in the movement had carried their message and signified the realization by adults that children must be further incorporated into the decision-making process. The children at the conference concluded by declaring the changes they had made to the state of their rights, saying that, "In places where we are organized, our 12 rights have considerably progressed for us and for other Working Children and Youth". Arguably, they have been as effective in promoting their rights and advancing their mission as many politically driven conventions and doctrines developed by adults.

In 2004, at the 2nd Meeting of the World Movement of Working Children and Adolescents in Berlin, child workers from around the world gathered again to voice their concerns and state their achievements. Too often, adults ignore all that children have to teach and concentrate solely on what they have to learn, something that people realized at this meeting. At this meeting, the children once again made the distinction between work that is suitable for them and that which is unacceptable, or that exploits them. Perhaps the most important statement made in the final declaration of the meeting was one aimed at the International Labor Organization (ILO), in which the child workers denounced "the policies of the ILO that aim at abolishing children's work. The ILO has failed to understand the realities of working children and the viable alternatives to exploitative labor".

In 1999, the ILO established Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labor, mandating that all members who signed the Convention took measures to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. As the working children agree, the worst forms of child labor are prostitution, slavery, drug trafficking and work, which, "by its nature...is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children." Still, though, the ILO has larger aims to completely eradicate child labor, proclaiming it a "global cause" on their website. This conflicts with the message of the working children, who concluded the final declaration of their second meeting with the mantra, "Yes to Dignified Work-No to Ex-



**LIDIA ANNA VIGYÁZÓ** Accident  
digital photograph, 2005





ploitation Because We Are Not Part of the Problem But Part of the Solution So That Our Voice Be Heard in the Whole World,” further frustrating cooperation between the two groups. By pointing out to the ILO the paradox of calling for the elimination of all child labor when ILO 182 sets a rubric for distinguishing between various forms of child labor, the child workers point out a problem of generalization they view as very detrimental to their overall well being.

People outside the movement see this inconsistency as well. UNESCO journalist Sophie Boukhari feels that the ILO and UNICEF have been forced to recognize that abolishing child labor only pushes children into more dangerous jobs, such as prostitution. Still, Boukhari points out the ambiguity behind the UN’s viewpoint on child labor and its position on the movement of working children in general, saying that, “The UN recognizes it is unrealistic and dangerous to want to abolish child labor...But the UN continues to campaign for abolition.” UNICEF, while sometimes seeming to support the Working Children’s Movement, “is strongly urging the World Trade Organization to adopt a ‘social clause,’ which would require minimum standards from companies, including a ban on child labor.” It is this “flip-flopping” that continues to confuse the world and frustrate the Working Children’s Movement about what is in the true “best interest” of the children on whose behalf these decisions are being made.

While substantial information in support of the movement abounds, criticism of the movement is not widely published. One highly respected academic in the field of child labor, William Myers, believes the reasoning behind this is quite obvious. “Who is going to go on record in full print attacking kids? They probably would risk losing more than they would gain by being perceived as anti-child”. Instead of directly criticizing the Working Children’s Movement, criticism tends to be disguised.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, ICFTU, founded in 1949, has over 200 affiliated organizations in 154 countries, and believes that no child should be deprived of an education or a childhood. The ICFTU encourages strict adherence to international conventions on labor standards, especially those made by the ILO. The ICFTU works closely with the ILO and membership is open only to trade unions structured democratically and immune from outside influence. Campaigns by the ICFTU cover a variety of issues related to labor rights, including “the respect and defense of trade

union and workers' rights, the eradication of forced and child labor... [and] encouraging the organization of young workers."

Interestingly, the ICFTU counts one of their campaigns as organizing youth workers, but another as eradicating child labor. The small differentiations the ICFTU makes between child and youth workers may seem significant to them – but the actual child workers see this discrepancy as arbitrary, detrimental to their well being, and a clear violation of their right to work to survive.

The claim that abolishing child labor is a matter of political will largely oversimplifies the problem as something that can be ended simply by making it illegal. In fact, the idea that child labor and all of the problems that accompany it will disappear once a country makes the practice illegal is akin to saying that poverty will be eradicated if a country's government uses political will to make poverty illegal. Not only does this idea neglect that economic measures must be taken to eradicate poverty; it does not answer the question of where all the poor people would go. If they knew that they would be in trouble for being poor, they would have to hide their poverty. Likewise, children who are unable to get work through conventional methods would be forced to turn to illegal and exploitative means of income, those that are outlawed under ILO Convention 182.

Perhaps the most compelling example of why abolishing child labor simply does not solve the problem can be found with the consequences of the Harkin Bill. United States Senator Harkin sponsored the 'Child Labor Deterrence Act of 1992', a bill that proposed the prohibition of U.S. imports made by children and an international ban on products made from child labor. In Bangladesh (a likely first target, were the bill to have become law), an estimated 50,000 working children were fired. This caused the recently fired children to turn to much more dangerous and exploitive means of work, with some children begging on the streets or turning to prostitution. Many scholars caution that substantial damage can be done when Northern ideals are imposed on the Southern countries, citing the Bangladesh case as "a warning about the consequences of simplistically applying rich-country assumptions and remedies to poor-country situations without adequate attention to differences of social and economic context."

By following an abolitionist approach to child labor instead of a regulative approach, the ICFTU seeks to eradicate child labor instead

of providing children with protection through better working conditions, which would be far more effective to the lives of the world's working children. The ICFTU does not appreciate the economic hardships that would be placed upon working children and their families if child labor were made illegal. Also, they do not recognize that the former child workers, in an attempt to find another source of income, will turn to illegal, unregulated jobs (such as prostitution) in order to survive. It makes far more sense to create legislation that would protect the children from being exploited, such as limiting the number of hours they can work and allotting time for school and play, than to make work illegal altogether, thereby ensuring that the children will turn to far more dangerous jobs to make up their lost income. The ICFTU believes that work combined with education is not sufficient. This directly contradicts the beliefs of the Working Children's Movement as a whole – that children desire an education in addition to the freedom to work so that their daily lives actually contribute in a positive way to their futures without neglecting their needs at the present time – and ignores the warnings of experts in the field.

The 'labor market perspective' accompanies the abolitionist approach and has been proven to be more detrimental than beneficial to the lives of child workers, placing the interests of adults over those of children and ignoring the reality of children's situations-- that they need to work in order to survive. This perspective is concerned with the impact child labor has on adult labor. A particular viewpoint of children goes along with this perspective, drawing upon the Western idea of childhood as a work-free time of life and the concept that children are "essentially innocent, ignorant of the world and incompetent to fend off its evils or even to recognize their own best interest."

Another organization vehemently opposed to the Working Children's Movement is the Global March against Child Labor, whose main objective lies in enforcing and expanding existing child labor laws. The Global March movement began when a group of people committed to ending child labor marched to the ILO Conference in Geneva, where ILO 182 was drafted. While the working children agree with ILO 182, the Global March can be seen as an opposing force to the Working Children's Movement, describing one of its objectives as eradicating child labor. When members of the Working Children's Movement met in 1998, they announced that they would not "participate in the Global March against Child Labour because

it's organisers refused to involve us and because we cannot march against our own work" .

One of the risks of the Global March is that it over generalizes child labor as slave labor, stating that it is a "movement born out of hope and the need felt by thousands of people across the globe-the desire to set children free from servitude". The fact of the matter is not only do child workers distinguish between child labor and slavery, the ILO does so as well with ILO 182, naming slavery as one of the worst forms of child labor.

The opposition movements above represent the historical response to child labor – campaigning for prohibitions against the practice of child labor in general. This is generally reached with a combination of abolitionist and protectionist (regulative) approaches mentioned above. The abolitionist portion involves fixing a minimum age for children to become employed while the protectionist piece involves legislation with an additional age for the employment of young people, generally specifying the number of hours and the type of jobs this group of people can participate in. This can be seen in the United States with the minimum age for employment set at 15 and restrictions placed on young people between the ages of 15 and 18.

The problem with this approach is that it is rarely enforced and may in fact be unenforceable. Many scholars hold that the way to fix the problem of child labor is not through compulsory education or labor legislation, instead arguing that the most important factor is, and always has been, family income. From the point of view of this school of thought, abolishing child labor will not fix the problem; the only way to fix the problem is for a country to become developed enough for families to have enough money without their children's income supplementing their own.

Ben White, a scholar in the field of child labor, believes that the employment of children is not in itself a problem; the "real problem is not in the age but in the fact that young workers are often subject to exaggerated forms of labor control and exploitation beyond those faced by adults because of the way society treats young people. Intervention groups seeking abolition, like Global March and ICFTU, utilize an approach that may in fact make the child labor problem worse. The reason that people turn towards the abolitionist approach is because they deny the ability of children to make their own decisions and to know what is best for their own lives – largely

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because the “prevailing view of childhood itself has seen children as passive victims and appropriate objects of external intervention, rather than as social subjects or agents of change, capable of both claiming and exercising rights.” Above all, the focus needs to be on understanding the reasons for and problems of child employment, not on eradicating it entirely. To achieve this aim, intervention groups need to “support the efforts of working children in trying to improve the conditions of life and work.”

In 1987, the Indonesian government realized the validity of regulative measures and issued the ‘Ministerial Regulation for Protection of Children who are Compelled to Work’ which recognized that there were certain social-economic conditions that required children below the minimum age to work and stipulated certain provisions that could not be violated, including minimum hours during the night, minimum wage standards and the opportunity of an education. This provision was abandoned in 1993, following pressure from the United States which threatened to withdraw some trading privileges. Additional pressure came from the ‘Child Labor Deterrence Act of 1992’, referenced above in the Bangladesh case, which called for a ban on all U.S. imports made by child labor. Similar tactics of boycotting, not condoned by the working children, can be seen inside the ICFTU as well. This increased pressure has forced many children to work illegally, leaving them without protection of any kind.

In a world where decisions are often made quickly and without consideration for the potential consequences, something as delicate as the well being of children should come under careful consideration and scrutiny. Clearly, the Bangladeshi experience mentioned above demonstrates that economic rights must be included in children’s rights, as “this case illustrates the serious consequences of ignoring children’s economic rights in the rush to ban work by children”. Thinking through the implications of a policy is always necessary.

The U.N., UNICEF and the world at large need to recognize the serious implications that come from enforcing the rules of the developed world on a global level. The Western world cannot continue to make global policy when they do not understand the reasons behind the existence of the developing world’s problems. It is easy to say that all children should go to school and not have to work, but for countries heavily in debt, where school funding is scarce, this is easier said than done. If children are going to work out of necessity, the world owes it to them to protect their rights in a manner suitable to

their situation. Otherwise, the world is not doing much to advance the rights of the children most at risk.

<sup>1</sup> The Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC, emerged as a result of advocacy by the children's rights movement itself, largely in place during the 1980s. Full text is available via: <http://www.unicef.org/crc/fulltext.htm>

<sup>2</sup> A target date as December 31, 1995, was set as the date for universal ratification of the CRC. By this date, 185 States had ratified, "making it the most widely and rapidly ratified human rights treaty in history." "The Convention on the Rights of the Child." UNICEF. 18 Feb. 2005 <<http://www.unicef.org/crc/convention.htm>>.

<sup>3</sup> "Full Text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child." UNICEF. 18 Feb. 2005 <<http://www.unicef.org/crc/fulltext.htm>>.

<sup>4</sup> "Full Text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child."

<sup>5</sup> McAdam, Doug, John D McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald. *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996: 2.

<sup>6</sup> Norgrove, Kate. "Working Children in Africa Fight for Rights." *Global Movement for Children*. 15 Nov. 2004. 5 Feb. 2005 <<http://www.gmfc.org/index.php/gmc6/content/view/full/270>>.

<sup>7</sup> "The Other Working Children and Youth Movements in the World." Enda. 17 Feb. 2005. 18 Feb. 2005 <[http://www.enda.sn/eja/page%20anglais/friends\\_of\\_afr\\_mouv.htm](http://www.enda.sn/eja/page%20anglais/friends_of_afr_mouv.htm)>.

<sup>8</sup> "Protagonism." *The Concerned for Working Children*. 5 Feb. 2005 <<http://www.workingchild.org/htm/prota2.htm>>.

<sup>9</sup> Norgrove

<sup>10</sup> Norgrove

<sup>11</sup> "Freeze Frame, Working Children's Rights in Nicaragua." *Global Citizenship in Action*. Canadian International Development Agency. 4 Nov. 2004. 17 Feb. 2005 <[http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/INET/IMAGES.NSF/vLUIImages/Publications/\\$file/Action\\_Americas.pdf](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/INET/IMAGES.NSF/vLUIImages/Publications/$file/Action_Americas.pdf)>.

<sup>12</sup> "Freeze Frame, Working Children's Rights in Nicaragua."

<sup>13</sup> "Freeze Frame, Working Children's Rights in Nicaragua."

<sup>14</sup> "Freeze Frame, Working Children's Rights in Nicaragua."

<sup>15</sup> "The Other Working Children and Youth Movements in the World."

<sup>16</sup> "The Other Working Children and Youth Movements in the World."

<sup>17</sup> "The Other Working Children and Youth Movements in the World."

<sup>18</sup> "Protagonism."

<sup>19</sup> "Protagonism."

<sup>20</sup> "Protagonism."

<sup>21</sup> "Protagonism."



- <sup>22</sup> "Protagonism."
- <sup>23</sup> "5th Meeting of the African Movement of Working Children and Youth Bamako (Mali), 31st October to 14th November 2000." Children and Youth in Action 14 Nov. 2000. 17 Feb. 2005 <<http://www.tu-berlin.de/fakl/gsw/pronats/doku/5thmeeting.htm>>.
- <sup>24</sup> "5th Meeting of the African Movement of Working Children and Youth Bamako (Mali), 31st October to 14th November 2000."
- <sup>25</sup> "World-wide Meeting of Working Children and Adolescents, Berlin 2004." Save the Children Sweden. 21 Oct. 2004. 17 Feb. 2005 <<http://www.scslat.org/news/eng/noticias.php?cod=48>>.
- <sup>26</sup> "World-wide Meeting of Working Children and Adolescents, Berlin 2004."
- <sup>27</sup> "World-wide Meeting of Working Children and Adolescents, Berlin 2004."
- <sup>28</sup> "Convention 182-Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour 17 June 1999." International Labour Organization. 26 Jan. 2000. 20 Feb. 2005. <<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc87/com-chic.htm>>.
- <sup>29</sup> "Convention 182."
- <sup>30</sup> "International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour: IPEC." International Labour Organization. 11 Feb. 2005. 20 Feb. 2005 <<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/index.htm>>.
- <sup>31</sup> "World-wide Meeting of Working Children and Adolescents, Berlin 2004."
- <sup>32</sup> Boukhari, Sophie. "Child Labour: A Lesser Evil?" UNESCO May 1999. 5 Feb. 2005 <[http://www.unesco.org/courier/1999\\_05/uk/ethique/txt1.htm](http://www.unesco.org/courier/1999_05/uk/ethique/txt1.htm)>.
- <sup>33</sup> Boukhari
- <sup>34</sup> Boukhari
- <sup>35</sup> The child's best interest is one of the guiding principles of the CRC and is outlined in Article 3. "The Convention on the Rights of the Child"
- <sup>36</sup> Correspondence with William Myers (E-Mail) 18 April 2005.
- <sup>37</sup> "Child Labour." International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). 18 April 2005 <<http://www.icftu.org/focus.asp?Issue=childlabour&Language=EN>>.
- <sup>38</sup> "Child Labour."
- <sup>39</sup> "Child Labour."
- <sup>40</sup> White, Ben. "Children, Work and 'Child Labour': Changing Responses to the Employment of Children." Development and Change 25 (1994): 870.

<sup>41</sup> Boukhari

<sup>42</sup> Myers, William E. "The Right Rights? Child Labor in a Globalizing World." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 175 (May 2001): 42.

<sup>43</sup> The abolitionist perspective is the most common historically. It aims for the full abolition of child labor. Hanson, Karl and Arne Vandaele. "Working children and international labor law: A critical analysis." *The International Journal of Children's Rights* 11.1 (2003): 77.

<sup>44</sup> The regulative approach allows for children to work with protectionist legislation, such as limiting the number of hours a child can work. Hanson and Vandaele, 78.

<sup>45</sup> "Child Labour."

<sup>46</sup> Myers, William E. "Appreciating Diverse Approaches to Child Labor." *Child Labor & the Globalizing Economy: Lessons from Asia/Pacific Countries Symposium Presentation*: 5. 9 Feb. 2001. 20 Feb. 2005 <<http://childlabor.org/symposium/myers.htm>>.

<sup>47</sup> Myers, "Appreciating Diverse Approaches" 2.

<sup>48</sup> Myers, "Appreciating Diverse Approaches" 4.

<sup>49</sup> "What is Global March." *Global March against Child Labor*. 18 April 2005 <<http://www.globalmarch.org/aboutus/index.php>>.

<sup>50</sup> "What is Global March."

<sup>51</sup> "Protagonism."

<sup>52</sup> "What is Global March"

<sup>53</sup> "C182 Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention." *International Labor Organization*. 9 April 2001. 18 April 2005 <<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/ratification/convention/text.htm>>.

<sup>54</sup> White, 849

<sup>55</sup> White, 849-850

<sup>56</sup> White, 850

<sup>57</sup> White, 850

<sup>58</sup> White, 850

<sup>59</sup> White, 850

<sup>60</sup> White, 852

<sup>61</sup> White, 851

<sup>62</sup> White, 851

<sup>63</sup> White, 869

<sup>64</sup> Hertel, Shareen. "New Moves in Transnational Advocacy: Getting Labor & Economic Rights On the Agenda in Unexpected Ways", *Forthcoming, Global Governance*: 6.



KATHERINE HOANG

A measure of government economic rights practices  
(May 2005)



**ABOUT KATHERINE**

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**CHRISTINE ELMORE** dartboard  
painting, 2005



## I. INTRODUCTION

Relatively little attention is paid to economic human rights. The justiciability of these rights is still under international debate, so it is hardly surprising that there is no internationally agreed upon measure of countries' protection of these rights. Scholars have developed a number of indices that attempt to illustrate economic rights conditions, but these do not reflect governments' capacity and willingness to adequately protect these rights. This paper has two purposes: the first is to construct a measure of governments' economic rights practices compared with their capacity to provide economic rights. The second is to examine possible policy variables that may explain variations in levels of economic rights practices, including government expenditures on health, education and military, level of exports of goods and services, inequality, debt servicing, and the presence of International Monetary Fund structural adjustment programs.

## II. ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Economic rights are sometimes not considered human rights at all. A criticism of economic rights is that "[they] have been defined primarily as aspirational goals to be achieved progressively" and the drafting of a separate covenant for these rights "reflect[s] an assessment of the practical difficulties that states would face in implementing generalized norms requiring substantial time and resources" (Dennis and Stewart, 2004). However, it has not been empirically proven that economic rights are more expensive to protect than other human rights (Donnelly, 2003).

Most Western countries such as the U.S. have historically embraced civil and political rights while excluding economic rights when addressing human rights in law and practice. For example, the U.S. has ratified the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but has not ratified the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR).

International agreements such as the CESCR provide a theoretical framework in which to address economic rights but fail to articulate standards of government economic rights practices that would be useful in enforcing those rights (Robertson, 1994). The covenant also lacks a clear enforcement mechanism. A measure of economic rights practices is crucial to adequately monitor governments' implementation of espoused policies. Governments too frequently claim extensive legislation and policies that are intended to protect economic rights, but the end result is that these policies are not put into action. A measure that targets government economic practices



may be more useful in analyzing policy and directing future efforts in improving economic rights conditions.

### III. SOCIAL RIGHTS AS A PREREQUISITE FOR ECONOMIC RIGHTS

The indicators chosen for the measurement of economic rights in this study are based on the underlying assumption that social rights are a prerequisite for economic rights. The Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights states:

...a State party in which any significant number of individuals is deprived of essential foodstuffs, of essential primary health care, of basic shelter and housing, or of the most basic forms of education is, prima facie, failing to discharge its obligations under the Covenant [to fulfill economic rights]. (OHCHR, 1990)

If a person is starving, they lack the capacity to work. If a person is denied adequate healthcare, they are not able to fully maximize their freedom to work. This assumption shapes the choice of economic rights indicators in this study. This notion also illustrates the fact that economic rights are undeniably linked to resources.

This assumption also opens the debate about economic rights fulfillment and its relationship to a country's wealth. Economic rights measures that use wealth as an indicator of economic rights practices are unfair to poor countries. Furthermore, that type of measure offers no opportunity for cross-country comparison; poor countries will inevitably score lower than rich countries in their economic rights practices. Therefore this study uses GDP/capita to indicate a country's ability to protect economic rights, not as an indicator of a country's economic rights practices.

Hence resource use is a key part of the study of countries' economic rights practices. The CESCR is the most widely accepted articulation of economic rights. It includes the right to work, the right of everyone to enjoy just and favorable conditions of work, fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind and that provides for a decent standard of living, and the right of everyone to a decent standard of living. Article 2, Section 1 of the covenant states:

Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to take steps, individually and through international assistance and co-operation, especially economic and technical, to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the present Covenant by all appropriate

means, including particularly the adoption of legislative measures. (OHCHR, 1966)

This broad statement makes it difficult to measure a country's compliance in protecting economic rights. How do we measure state compliance with the obligation "to the maximum of its available resources?" The committee emphasizes "even where the available resources are demonstrably inadequate, the obligation remains for a State party to strive to ensure the widest possible enjoyment of the relevant rights under the prevailing circumstances" (OHCHR, 1990).

#### IV. MEASUREMENT PROBLEMS

There are many obstacles to developing a good measure of economic rights that is both accurate and universally accepted. Insufficient or misreported data is one of the greatest challenges. For example, unemployment statistics are largely absent from developing countries data, and particularly in agrarian societies, the seasonal nature of agricultural production leaves most people unemployed for at least some part of the year. In rich countries such as the U.S., the Human Poverty Index is not reported. Inequality is another statistic that has significant gaps of missing data. Furthermore, researchers collecting data often rely on second-hand sources such as news reports; for example new reports of torture convey not actual incidences of torture, but the incidences of news reports of torture (Barsh, 1993).

Determining which indicators are most important in measuring economic rights is also problematic. Quantifying concepts such as the right to work and the right to health may appear to be a simple task, but in reality the chosen indicators may or may not measure the concepts they are supposed to represent (Barsh, 1993). Researchers often pick and choose indicators based on which ones correlate most to their hypotheses instead of indicators that will produce the most accurate results, and therefore produce biased results in their studies.

Assigning appropriate values to indicators is another area where researchers make mistakes. Since an appropriate measure must be simple and easy to construct, assigning weights to indicators can oversimplify the actual economic rights conditions in a country. Charles Humana's World Human Rights Guide includes a measurement of "social and economic equality for ethnic minorities" in the Americas for which there were three scores: full respect, some

violations, and substantial violations (Humana, 1986). These three categories are broad and unrealistic, particularly in assuming that some countries score with full respect. No country is perfect, but in order to measure the economic and social rights conditions, Humana must discount certain violations in order for the measure to be simple enough to be applied universally.

Many of the measures that have been developed focus on other human rights, particularly physical integrity rights such as the right to live free from torture. Measures that focus exclusively on economic rights include the work of Cingranelli and Richards (2004) and Kimenyi (2005). Cingranelli and Richards measure government respect for economic rights using the Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI), while Kimenyi uses the United Nations Human Development Index. Both examine the residuals in their regressions that regress the PQLI against GDP to determine the level of government willingness to protect economic rights.

#### **V. MEASURE BACKGROUND**

The proposed measure in this study builds from Cingranelli and Richards' basic contention that government respect for economic rights is a function of both ability and willingness (Cingranelli and Richards, 2004). Ability reflects the available resources a government can use to protect economic rights, and willingness reflects how willing they are to direct those available resources towards the protection of economic rights. In this study we use GDP/capita to reflect the available resources a government can use to protect economic rights.

A measure of economic rights practices must include an indicator for the economic rights conditions in the country. Standard of living indicators are an adequate proxy for economic rights conditions because there is a strong correlation between poverty and economic rights conditions. People who do not have basic needs such as food or adequate health care cannot fully exercise their economic rights. This notion is based on the relationship between economic and social rights discussed earlier in the paper.

Measures most frequently used to reflect standard of living and poverty are development indicators such as the Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI) and the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI). The PQLI encompasses infant mortality, life expectancy at age one, and basic literacy (UNDP, 2004). The HDI measures life expectancy at birth, knowledgeability as embodied by the adult

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literacy rate and gross school enrollment at all levels, and GDP per capita (UNDP, 2004).

Development indicators are strongly correlated with national wealth, implying that poor countries will inevitably score lower on economic rights protection than richer countries. This relationship is extensively documented in development research and is the unfortunate reality for poorer countries. Therefore, it is unfair to measure economic rights protection without accounting for countries' ability and available resources to protect those rights.

Both PQLI and HDI measure standard of living, but they do not capture all the aspects of poverty that relate to economic rights. PQLI reflects levels of health and knowledge, but does not reflect whether people enjoy a decent standard of living. Furthermore, because the infant mortality rate and life expectancy at age one reflect levels of health, this aspect of economic rights is double counted. The HDI includes GDP/capita as one of its component indices, but since this study attempts to analyze income and its relationship to standard of living, we cannot use an indicator that is based on income.

The UN Human Poverty Index (HPI) used in this study summarizes deprivations in longevity as measured by the probability at birth of not surviving to age 40, deprivations in knowledgeability as measured by the percentage of illiterate adults, and deprivations in a decent standard of living as measured by [BOTH] the percentage of people without sustainable access to an improved water source and the percentage of underweight children below age five (UNDP, 2004). The HPI's measure employs the same aspects of human development as HDI but reflects a wider range of variables that define poverty without using GDP/capita. This gives a better estimate of the level of economic rights protection. In addition, the HPI weights deprivations in each of the three areas – health, education, standard of living – equally unlike the PQLI. The value of the HPI ranges from zero, implying no one in the population is deprived in any of the three areas, to 100 implying that everyone is deprived in all three of the areas. The value of the HPI can be interpreted as the average percentage of the population that experiences deprivation in one of the areas. By subtracting the HPI from 100, one obtains an indicator of the average percentage of the population that enjoys economic rights fulfillment in one of the three areas.

#### VI. HIV/AIDS

Another important variable that influences a country's ability to

protect economic rights is HIV/AIDS prevalence. This factor is most often noted briefly, and at worst completely overlooked as a factor influencing a government's ability to provide a decent standard of living and to protect economic rights. The devastating impact of HIV/AIDS affects all aspects of human and economic development. Countries with the highest levels of HIV/AIDS prevalence experience decreases in economic growth by as much as 1 to 2 percent (Population and Development Review, 2001). HIV/AIDS severely reduces governments' capacity to respond to social needs beyond immediate treatment. HIV/AIDS has a disastrous impact on the capacity of Governments to deliver basic social services. Human resources are lost, public revenues reduced and budgets diverted towards coping with the impact. (Population and Development Review, 2001)

HIV/AIDS also affects poverty variables included in HPI such as health, education and standard of living. Countries with the highest levels of HIV/AIDS have seen increases in under-five mortality rates and lower life expectancy at birth. Education and literacy rates are affected as teachers die and orphans whose parents died from HIV/AIDS drop out of school. Food security is also reduced as HIV/AIDS affects food production.

There are a number of factors that affect a government's ability to provide a decent standard of living to the poorest in its population besides national income and HIV/AIDS prevalence, however, the overwhelming impact of HIV/AIDS on all aspects of society and its rapid spread make it a unique variable. The unlikelihood of a present solution to cure HIV/AIDS, the costliness of treatment, and the huge reversals in economic and human development it causes warrants it special attention when assessing a country's ability to fulfill its citizens' economic rights.

#### VII. PROPOSED MEASURE

The proposed measure in this study of a government's willingness to direct available resources towards securing its citizens' economic rights is derived by estimating:

$$100 - \text{HPI} = a + b(\text{GDP/capita } \$\text{PPP}) + c(\text{GDP/capita } \$\text{PPP})^2 + d(\text{HIV prevalence}) + e.$$

GDP/capita \$PPP and HIV prevalence reflect governments' ability to protect economic rights. GDP/capita \$PPP squared is used to illus-

trate the curvilinear relationship between GDP/capita and standard of living in which standard of living rises as GDP/capita increases at a decreasing rate. I use  $100 - \text{HPI}$  to reflect the portion of the population that is not poor and enjoys economic rights. The residual signifies the government's willingness to protect economic rights. If the residual is positive, that means the country's government raised the standard of living and level of protection of economic rights more than would be expected given its ability. If the residual is negative, the government has done worse than would be expected given its available resources. Cingranelli and Roberts, as well as many others, have analyzed the residual as an indicator of performance in this context.

In considering government willingness, government's may be more than willing to devote resources to protect economic rights but may not see positive results. Governments may be exerting great effort towards implementing economic rights, but due to other factors may not be successful. Our measure of economic rights therefore is more a measure of effective policy implementation and practices signified by the term "willingness."

Data on only 177 countries was available from the United Nations Development Program 2004 Human Development Report (UN-HDR). Data on the HPI is available for 80 member countries.

# VIII. RESULTS FROM REGRESSION I

MODEL		UNSTANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS		STANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS	T	SIG.
		B	STD. ERROR	BETA		
I	CONSTANT	57.759	2.191	1.357	26.357	.000
	GDP/CAP	.006	.001	-.875	9.061	.000
	GDP <sup>2</sup> /CAP	-.0000001982	.000	-.363	-5.870	.000
	HIV	-.890	.161		-5.514	.000

## a Dependent Variable: 100-HPI

The regression shows a strong relationship between HPI and the variables GDP per capita, GDP per capita squared, and HIV prevalence. As predicted, the results from our measure clearly indicate a statistically significant positive correlation between per capita income and standard of living. As GDP per capita rises, 100-HPI initially rises but subsequently falls once per capita income rises above roughly

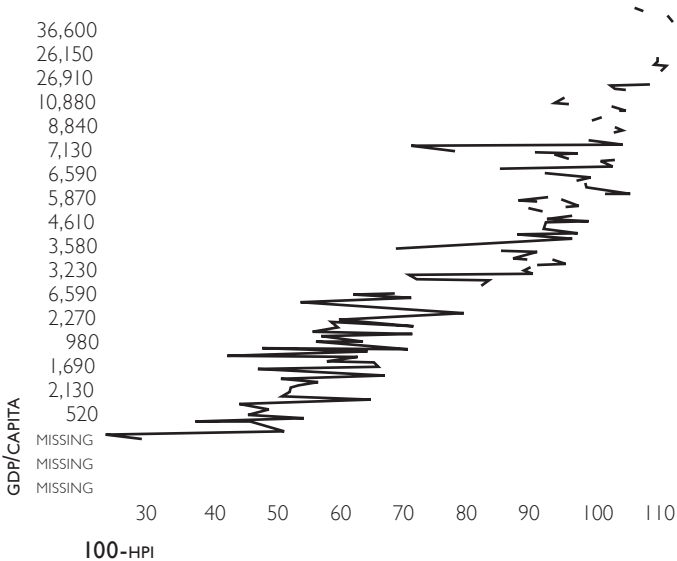
**MALERIE SCHWARTZ** Untitled  
digital photograph, 2006





PPP \$15,000. Also, there is a strong statistically significant correlation between HIV prevalence and HPI. HIV prevalence negatively affects the standard of living and the economic rights conditions in the country.

100-HPI and GDP/capita



Appendix A contains the list of countries and their residuals. Unfortunately, since the majority of industrialized nations do not have data on HPI-I, their residuals are not included in this study. These include Norway, Sweden, Australia, Canada, Netherlands, Belgium, Iceland, the United States, Japan, Ireland, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Finland, Austria, Luxembourg, France, Denmark, New Zealand, Germany, Spain, Italy, and Israel. The UNHDR report also excludes the following UN member countries for which HPI cannot be computed: Afghanistan, Andorra, Iraq, Kiribati, the Democratic Republic of Korea, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Monaco, Nauru, Palau, San Marino, Serbia and Montenegro, Somalia, and Tuvalu.

Also, a number of other countries from various development categories do not have residuals listed due to missing data. However, among the countries included, there is wide variation in residuals, with some performing much higher than their ability and a few performing much worse. Most notably, Bolivia has the highest positive residual, 14.68514, reflecting its top performance in protecting economic rights, and Oman has the largest negative residual, -32.2304, the worst economic rights score.

These scores are interpreted as reflecting governments' economic rights practices. Defining the residual in such a narrow sense may be problematic; the residual is meant to represent all unexplained variables in the equation. As noted earlier, "willingness" may include factors other than government inclination to direct available resources towards protecting economic rights. However, since there is a strong correlation between GDP per capita and HPI, and HIV prevalence and HPI, it is less risky to interpret the residual as a variation of those variables. The strong statistical significance implies that the residual may be interpreted as a variation of government respect for economic rights. Furthermore, the residuals also capture measurement error unrelated to a country's ability to provide economic rights.

#### **IX. POLICY VARIABLES**

The second purpose of this paper is to provide insight into the factors that affect countries' performance in protecting economic rights. "Willingness" embodies the government's willingness, policy success, and other variables that may affect the economic rights conditions in a country. Governments need to implement the right policies that are actually effective in providing for economic rights. Defining the factors that influence policy success is difficult because they are not tangible; many unquantifiable, but key aspects, are political environ-

ment, corruption, and underdeveloped institutions. However, focusing on government expenditures as a percentage of GDP is useful in developing a framework to understand the residual in our measure. Looking at the expenditures as a percentage of GDP also corrects for differences in cross-country wealth, providing a more fair analysis.

Health and education expenditures are frequently used as indicators of the government's willingness to raise the standard of living. This study uses data on public health expenditure as a percentage of GDP \$PPP, public expenditure on pre-primary and primary education as a percentage of GDP \$PPP, [AND] public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP \$PPP; this data is taken from the United Nations Development Program 2004 Human Development Report (UNHDR).. The UNHDR defines public health expenditure as current and capital spending from government (central and local) budgets, external borrowings and grants (including donations from international agencies and non-governmental organizations) and social (or compulsory) health insurance funds. The UNHDR defines public education expenditure as both capital expenditures (spending on construction, renovation, major repairs and purchase of heavy equipment or vehicles) and current expenditures (spending on goods and services that are consumed within the current year and would need to be renewed the following year). It covers such expenditures as staff salaries and benefits, contracted or purchased services, books and teaching materials, welfare services, furniture and equipment, minor repairs, fuel, insurance, rents, telecommunication and travel.

On the other hand, military expenditures may reflect the government's unwillingness to direct available resources towards raising the standard of living and protecting economic rights. It is noted that some governments are forced to maintain a high level of military expenditures due to civil and international conflict; however, it remains an important indication of the direction of public funds. Military expenditures as defined by the UNHDR include all expenditures of the defense ministry and other ministries on recruiting and training military personnel as well as on construction and purchase of military supplies and equipment. Military assistance is included in the expenditures of the donor country.

Inequality is also a variable that may affect the standard of living. The adverse affects of inequality are well documented. Fundamental aspects of development including openness, institutions, and educa-

tion are the means through which the middle class raises its level of income and standard of living.

The evidence suggests that the positive association between middle class share and economic development...is due to a causal effect of the former on the latter...[H]igh inequality [is] a large and statistically significant hindrance to developing the mechanisms by which economic development is achieved. (Easterly, 2002)

Inequality is a barrier to raising a country's standard of living because it fuels underdevelopment in areas such as nutrition, education, and health. Asset inequality in particular, and especially of human capital, disproportionately affects income growth of the poor. A more even distribution of assets increases the income of the poor and directly reduces poverty (Birdsall and Londono, 1997). High levels of inequality can also become barriers to employment as individuals come to believe that efforts to improve their human capital or compete in the market would be futile. Therefore there is substantial evidence to hypothesize that inequality may be a mitigating factor in explaining the level of protection of economic rights. This study uses the Gini index taken from data in the UNHDR (2004).

Debt service as a percentage of GDP is also a policy variable that may explain differences in levels of economic rights. For poorer countries, diverting limited funds towards debt service may have a devastating impact on the standard of living and level of economic rights enjoyment. Countries owing the most debt face higher levels of malnutrition, infant mortality, disease, and illiteracy than other developing countries at comparable per capita income levels (Maguire, 2000). These countries that seek loans in the first place tend to have pre-existing low levels of growth and high levels of poverty, and debt servicing further exacerbates the poverty conditions.

It is now well established that debt is incompatible with, and in fact deleterious to, human development. The central message...is that the current levels of debt among heavily indebted poor countries have severe negative consequences for human development, because external debt servicing requirements limit the resources available for investments in human development and discourage economic growth. (Maguire, 2000)

Many poor countries divert significantly more resources towards debt servicing than on social services such as health and education. African governments spend an average of four times more on debt repayments to northern creditors than they spend on health and

education. The Philippines spends 30% more of its national budget on debt servicing than on social services. Other countries with similar ratios include Brazil, Cameroon, Jamaica and Zambia (Maguire, 2000). Examining debt payments as a policy variable affecting economic rights protection may help explain variations in the country residuals. This study uses debt service as a percentage of exports of goods and services for the year 2002. This provides an opportunity for cross-country comparison with debt service as a proportion of national income. The data are taken from the UNHDR, which defines debt service as the sum of principal repayments and interest actually paid in foreign currency, goods or services on long-term debt (having a maturity of more than one year), interest paid on short-term debt and repayments to the International Monetary Fund (UNHDR, 2004).

The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) response to poor countries' economic crises may also have an effect on economic rights protection. The IMF's structural adjustment programs that seek to help countries solve balance-of-payments crises, achieve macroeconomic growth and reduce poverty are the target of extensive criticism. Critics claim that the IMF's programs actually increase poverty and underdevelopment. MacLeans and Mangum (2001) discuss structural adjustment programs' impact on sub-Saharan Africa: [A]djustment and stabilization programs tend to endanger human resource development. Even more telling, social conditions and human development considerably worsened, with the deterioration in the areas of education, health, employment and income, with especially serious effects on children, school graduates and women. (Macleans and Mangum, 2001)

These effects on standard of living are not surprising given that structural adjustment programs raise prices of goods and services by removing government subsidies for basic consumption items including food, transport, and energy. Local currencies are devalued which raises real prices for imported goods and services, and unemployment increases because of public and private cutbacks in firms who are forced to scale back in the face of newly introduced foreign competition. Social services are also decreased. These changes have a profound impact on the standard of living of the most vulnerable in society. The presence of IMF structural adjustment in countries may have a unique impact on the levels of economic rights protection. To test this hypothesis, a "dummy" variable was created. Countries under an IMF program currently or within the past five years were

assigned a value of 1, while all other countries were assigned a value of zero.

X. Regression 2

To examine the effects of the policy variables on the level of economic rights protection the following is estimated:

$$y = \vartheta + \sum_{L=1}^8 \beta_L X_L + \varepsilon$$

where  $y$  is the residual from regression 1,  $X_L$  are the policy variables of concern,  $\beta_L$  their estimated coefficients,  $\vartheta$  the intercept term, and  $\varepsilon$  is the error term. The eight policy variables are as follows:

**HEALTH** government expenditures on health as a percentage of GDP

**PRIME GDP** government expenditures on pre-primary and primary education as a percentage of GDP

**EDUCATION** government expenditures on education (all levels) as a percentage of GDP

**MILITARY** government expenditures on military as a percentage of GDP

**EXPORT** exports of goods and services as a percentage of GDP

**GINI** gini coefficient

**DEBT** debt service as a percentage of exports of goods and services

**IMF** under an IMF program currently or within the last five years

XI. REGRESSION 2 RESULTS

MODEL		UNSTANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS		STANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS	T	SIG.
		B	STD. ERROR	BETA		
1	CONSTANT	-8.217	9.890	.082	-.831	.420
	HEALTH	.489	1.799	-.356	.272	.790
	PRIME GDP	-.027	.056	.316	-.490	.632
	EDUCATION	1.162	2.565	-.314	.453	.657
	MILITARY	-1.218	1.025	-.058	-1.188	.254
	EXPORT	-.029	.128	.293	-.224	.826
	GINI	.201	.239	.244	.840	.415
	DEBT	.094	.110	.128	.855	.407
	IMF	2.594	5.262		.493	.630

**MALERIE SCHWARTZ** Tree  
color photograph, 2006



The results from the regression show very little statistical significance of the effects of the policy variables on the residual. This evidence is contrary to our hypothesis that these variables can significantly explain variations in government protection of economic rights. These results, in regards to the policy variable inequality are surprising given the extensive literature that exists concerning the effects of these variables on standard of living. The contradictory results in this study may be due to the presence of missing data that can result in less correlation between the variables and the residual.

To remove any distortions caused by multi-colinearity, I regressed each policy variable on the residual separately. This produced similar results in which there was no statistical significance in each regression.

Empirically, this study shows that the policy variables government health, education and military expenditures, exports of goods and services as a percentage of GDP, inequality, debt servicing as a percentage of exports, and the presence of IMF structural adjustment programs, explain very little about differences in government economic rights practices. However, these relationships may require further study.

## **XII. CONCLUSION**

This study has shown that government practices of economic rights protection can be measured by regressing GDP per capita, GDP per capita squared, and HIV prevalence on 100 minus HPI and examining the residual. The measure gives a prediction of a government's ability to protect economic rights based on GDP per capita and HIV prevalence. Deviations from this predicted value reflect a government's willingness to protect economic rights with the sign of the residual indicating whether they perform better or worse, given their ability. I have developed a measure that is simple and allows for cross-country comparison correcting for differences in national income. The evidence shows that economic rights are positively correlated with GDP per capita and negatively correlated to HIV prevalence.

Since there is such a high correlation between the independent variables and 100 minus HPI, I conclude that the error term in the equation explains variations in economic rights protection. However, I have also attempted to explain differences in government economic rights practices by examining policy variables that have a potential impact on the level of government protection of economic rights. These policy variables included government expenditures on total



education, pre-primary and primary education, health, military, and exports of goods and services, as a percentage of GDP, inequality as reflected in the Gini index, debt servicing as a percentage of exports, and the presence of IMF structural adjustment programs from 1995-2000. Although there proved to be no statistical significance in the relationships between these variables and the residuals from regression 1, this may be due to the presence of substantial missing data.

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**APPENDIX A**

HDI RANKING	COUNTRY	RESIDUAL
1	Norway	
2	Sweden	
3	Australia	
4	Canada	
5	Netherlands	
6	Belgium	
7	Iceland	
8	United States	
9	Japan	
10	Ireland	

HDI RANKING	COUNTRY	RESIDUAL
11	Switzerland	
12	United Kingdom	
13	Finland	
14	Austria	
15	Luxembourg	
16	France	
17	Denmark	
18	New Zealand	
19	Germany	
20	Spain	
21	Italy	
22	Israel	
23	Hong Kong, China (SAR)	
24	Greece	
25	Singapore	9.49848
26	Portugal	
27	Slovenia	
28	Korea, Rep. of	
29	Barbados	-2.36967
30	Cyprus	
31	Malta	
32	Czech Republic	
33	Brunei Darussalam	
34	Argentina	
35	Seychelles	
36	Estonia	
37	Poland	
38	Hungary	
39	Saint Kitts and Nevis	
40	Bahrain	
41	Lithuania	
42	Slovakia	
43	Chile	-0.14059
44	Kuwait	
45	Costa Rica	1.95657
46	Uruguay	5.08319
47	Qatar	
48	Croatia	
49	United Arab Emirates	
50	Latvia	
51	Bahamas	

HDI RANKING	COUNTRY	RESIDUAL
52	Cuba	11.93207
53	Mexico	-3.31494
54	Trinidad and Tobago	-0.35705
55	Antigua and Barbuda	
56	Bulgaria	
57	Russian Federation	
58	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	-5.8837
59	Malaysia	
60	Macedonia, TFYR	
61	Panama	6.65852
62	Belarus	
63	Tonga	
64	Mauritius	
65	Albania	
66	Bosnia and Herzegovina	
67	Suriname	
68	Venezuela	8.51081
69	Romania	
70	Ukraine	
71	Saint Lucia	
72	Brazil	-2.59395
73	Colombia	5.40319
74	Oman	-32.2304
75	Samoa (Western)	
76	Thailand	-0.94549
77	Saudi Arabia	
78	Kazakhstan	
79	Jamaica	13.87928
80	Lebanon	10.99695
81	Fiji	-5.04692
82	Armenia	
83	Philippines	6.20236
84	Maldives	
85	Peru	5.04343
86	Turkmenistan	
87	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	
88	Turkey	0.81323
89	Paraguay	Residual
90	Jordan	
91	Azerbaijan	9.22951
92	Tunisia	

HDI RANKING	COUNTRY	RESIDUAL
93	Grenada	
94	China	-7.59504
95	Dominica	
96	Sri Lanka	6.39496
97	Georgia	
98	Dominican Republic	5.60502
99	Belize	
100	Ecuador	-0.19586
101	Iran, Islamic Rep. of	-0.6963
102	Occupied Palestinian Territories	12.02752
103	El Salvador	-4.4816
104	Guyana	
105	Cape Verde	1.89063
106	Syrian Arab Republic	10.14964
107	Uzbekistan	
108	Algeria	9.88268
109	Equatorial Guinea	
110	Kyrgyzstan	-6.81558
111	Indonesia	
112	Viet Nam	
113	Moldova, Rep. of	7.63222
114	Bolivia	10.14072
115	Honduras	
116	Tajikistan	14.68514
117	Mongolia	13.31675
118	Nicaragua	
119	South Africa	13.68009
120	Egypt	10.82521
121	Guatemala	
122	Gabon	-8.15317
123	São Tomé and Príncipe	0.06283
124	Solomon Islands	
125	Morocco	
126	Namibia	
127	India	-11.6642
128	Botswana	-5.31914
129	Vanuatu	
130	Cambodia	-2.7995
131	Ghana	
132	Myanmar	-9.29911
133	Papua New Guinea	7.39307

HDI RANKING	COUNTRY	RESIDUAL
134	Bhutan	12.08818
135	Lao People's Dem. Rep.	
136	Comoros	
137	Swaziland	
138	Bangladesh	
139	Sudan	-9.27893
140	Nepal	2.6585
141	Cameroon	-6.36402
142	Pakistan	0.53256
143	Togo	-10.215
144	Congo	-0.3652
145	Lesotho	9.13901
146	Uganda	7.01766
147	Zimbabwe	1.71206
148	Kenya	-0.81166
149	Yemen	4.92227
150	Madagascar	-2.92815
151	Nigeria	3.61793
152	Mauritania	7.04494
153	Haiti	-17.5832
154	Djibouti	-2.81369
155	Gambia	
156	Eritrea	-11.8478
157	Senegal	-2.22422
158	Timor-Leste	-9.92923
159	Rwanda	
160	Guinea	-5.05644
161	Benin	
162	Tanzania, U. Rep. of	-7.82333
163	Côte d'Ivoire	10.73562
164	Zambia	-4.99485
165	Malawi	1.7363
166	Angola	4.74244
167	Chad	
168	Congo, Dem. Rep. of the	-8.86902
169	Central African Republic	-0.65303
170	Ethiopia	-0.04036
171	Mozambique	.
172	Guinea-Bissau	-2.64575
173	Burundi	.
174	Mali	-1.8384

HDI RANKING	COUNTRY	RESIDUAL
175	Burkina Faso	-20.2568
176	Niger	-25.7392
177	Sierra Leone	-22.6611

## APPENDIX B

### DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

	N	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION
I00-HPI	94	34.50	97.50	71.8989	16.07724
GDP/CAPITA	174	520	61190	9231.13	10001.801
GDP/CAPITA^2	174	270400.00	3744216100.00	184674900.3621	394735025.42271
HIV PREVALENCE	142	0	39	2.57	6.136
TOTAL HEALTH EXPENDITURE	175	0	8	3.46	1.742
	134	1	11	4.53	1.992
TOTAL EDUCATION EXPENDITURE	93	23940.00	1767780.00	431613.3849	354877.62092
	127	0	24	2.67	2.807
PRIMARY EDUCATION EXPENDITURE	162	7	151	40.55	23.904
	127	24	71	40.16	10.323
MILITARY EXPENDITURE	116	1	69	14.65	12.079
EXPORTS	177	0	1	.23	.423
GINI	23				
DEBT					
IMF					
VALID N (LISTWISE)					

**LIDIA ANNA VIGYÁZÓ** Reflection  
digital photograph, 2005







BENJAMIN A. LINHARD

The threads we wear



#### ABOUT BEANJAMIN

Benjamin is a freshman majoring in history at the University of Connecticut. His aspirations are to attend law school and become a prosecutor. He also wants to eventually become involved in politics.

In his creative writing essay "The threads we wear" Benjamin juxtapositions his own experience as a young sales clerk at Sears with an account of the working conditions of those who made the merchandise which he is selling. Through this creative device, Benjamin educates the reader about his/her own complicity in a system of economic injustice.



It is 9am. As I speed towards work, I realize that I am supposed to be at work at nine. Oh well, I will be five minutes late, I doubt my manager will care. I turn into the parking lot of Sears and hurriedly park my car. I hate working at this time, it is so early. My manager is pretty flexible, so I feel bad complaining about a 9 a.m. shift. I'm sure in a few years, once I complete my education, I will always be working at 9 a.m. I walk into the employee entrance and punch in. Then I head to my station in the Shoe Department. I go towards the cash registers and start them up since I am the first one here in the morning. There are no customers, so I sit back on the counter. This job is pretty laid back. Usually business is relatively slow except around the holidays and back to school season. During those seasons management usually makes sure there are plenty of treats such as, free subs and pizza for everyone in the break room. Since I am opening in the shoe department it is my responsibility to make sure everything looks sharp for our customers. As I walk through the department I inspect the rows of Nikes, Reeboks and the various brands we sell. These shoes came from far away. The big boxes they come in are usually stamped with places like Port of Shanghai or Port of Singapore. The people that make these shoes live an entirely different life than I live. Not just because they are from a different country but they also work in harsher unimaginable conditions.

The shoe factories are located in some of the world's poorest countries ([www.sweatshopwatch.org](http://www.sweatshopwatch.org)). China, Indonesia, Haiti, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, are some of the names on the list. The workers in the factories are poorly paid, often between fifteen and thirty cents an hour (Ross 24). At times the amount they are paid works out to less because management will skim some off the top (Ross 113). They do not receive pay stubs and are paid in cash (Ross 98). This ensures there are no records; without any evidence, no criminal complaint can be brought against the manufacturers. The workers who make the actual product typically receive less than one percent of the product's retail value (Ross 111). They can barely afford food, housing in a shack, and clothes for themselves (Ross 105).

Yes, these sweatshop laborers are unskilled and therefore probably the least important people in the chain since anyone can do their job. Despite being the base of every apparel company, the workers don't even earn one percent of the products value. I don't think it would be too much for rich company executives to increase their manufacturers share by just a little bit. It might mean putting premium gas instead of super premium gas in their fancy sports cars, but



**CREATIVE DRAWING GROUP** Untitled #003  
mural, 2006

I think it is a definite possibility.

Pay day for me is pretty simple. I have direct deposit, so beginning at 12:01 am every other Friday I can log onto [www.sears.com](http://www.sears.com) and view my pay stub electronically. I can save it in PDF format for further review on my computer, or I can print it out and have a hard copy. Then I log onto my bank account and see the deposit just made from Sears Roebuck and Co. I can immediately access the new funds with my debit card, or I can wait till 9 a.m. in the morning when the bank opens.

In addition to their incredibly low salaries, the sweatshop workers are cruelly treated and work long hours (Ross 103). The slightest infraction typically result in an immediate termination of their employment (Ross 98). If they are not fired, then they are beat, whipped or tortured. Sometimes they are beaten because their supervisor is in the mood (Ross 113). The females are sexually harassed and raped (Ross 113). They have excessively high quotas to meet, and the sweatshop supervisors have little sympathy for those who are under parity (Ross 101). They work in dirty, dusty and dangerous conditions (Ross 105). They are yelled at for daring to use the restroom (Ross 105). The most horrific fact is that a good portion of the workers are children (Ross 113). As I look upon the shoe wall at Sears and see how squeaky clean each pair is, I find myself wondering how they could have come out of factories so dirty. No, factory is too good of a term to describe these sweatshops. It does not convey the truth that the sweatshops' famous brands are manufactured in should never pass any sort of inspection in our country.

I imagine that the executives of the manufacturing companies on the wall are sitting in the back of limousines as they make their way to work. Those executives have probably had a healthy breakfast with great tasting coffee, or maybe a cappuccino. They probably live in splendid opulence. Their mansions might be as big as the shanty towns where the people who make their shoes reside. But why shouldn't they live in such affluence? I mean don't they deserve it? In the last twenty years they have skillfully cut costs by transporting thousands of decent paying American factory jobs to third world countries where the workers are paid a tiny fraction of what their American equivalents made. Meanwhile thousands of Americans were put out of work, and when they managed to find new work they generally worked for less money ([www.sweatshopwatch.org](http://www.sweatshopwatch.org)). Factory pay dropped by two percent between 1992 and 1997 while



the executives in charge received raises around 500% (Ross 9).

I wonder what a typical day for a teenage sweatshop worker would be like. From my research in *No Sweat* by Andrew Ross and [www.sweatshopwatch.org](http://www.sweatshopwatch.org) I can gather that it is a very unpleasant day. He rises early in the morning to get his own breakfast if he has any at all. His parents, if he is still with them, are probably very poor (Ross 103). He lives in wretched conditions with poor sanitation and bacteria everywhere. He is uneducated, it is too expensive, and it would take up working time anyways (Ross 103). He works hard for fourteen to fifteen hours, with a short lunch break (Ross 103). He must physically burn himself in order to meet high quotas. When he doesn't meet his quotas he is likely beaten (Ross 98). At the end of the day he stumbles home, with enough energy to eat and sleep. In order to gain energy for another hard day.

The workers tried to improve their conditions, by forming unions. Or at least they tried to get laws passed that would give them some protection. Unfortunately, unionizing for these sweatshop workers is like Americans trying to get the minimum wage to be a hundred dollars an hour. It just is not practical with their current conditions. The first impediment for unions is the lack of government support. The governments themselves often brutally suppress unions ([www.sweatshopwatch.org](http://www.sweatshopwatch.org)). If the government does not directly suppress the unions it does so by ignoring the sweatshop managements' suppression efforts (Ross 116). If the unions do succeed, the companies just close shop and relocate to another location without unions ([www.sweatshopwatch.org](http://www.sweatshopwatch.org)). Management often hires assassins and death squads to deal brutally with the leaders of unions (Ross 116). The sweatshop supervisors maintain a computerized database of suspected union members with photographs and fake names (Ross 87). It is impossible to get a job if you are in the computer blacklist. It is amazing how extensive the efforts at union suppression are in many of the third world countries. It is the sweatshop managements' grim recognition of the fact that if their workers are allowed to unionize similar to workers in America, it would mean the end of brutally cheap labor and skyrocketing incomes for management.

The L.V. Myles factory in Haiti is a subcontractor for Disney. Charles Kernaghan, a senior official in the National Labor Committee went there and recorded some impressions and testimony from sweatshop workers there. One laborer commented that "they [management] treat you like garbage. They don't look at you as a human

being, but as a piece of shit. The owners won't even talk to us, and if they don't like your face or you're sick, they fire you" (Ross 101). The laborer is required to complete 200 pieces of clothing every hour. "The supervisors pace the assembly lines clapping their hands and shrieking at the workers to go faster" (Ross 101). "At the end of the day all the workers are exhausted" (Ross 101).

I am allotted plenty of breaks. Today I am working the longest shift; it is scheduled for eight and a half hours, so I get two fifteen minute breaks and one half hour break. Sometimes I sneak in an extra break if I'm tired because the managers don't really care as long as you don't leave when the department is busy, or if you're all by yourself. During my break I am able to do many things. I can watch TV, read a newspaper, or just chill in the break room. If I feel like it I can walk around the store and shop, or I can walk through the mall go to other stores. Sometimes I drive home and play video games on my break. My breaks are pretty relaxing; my biggest complaint is I wish they had couches in the break room to take a nap.

The executives of the famous manufacturing companies have much to be happy about. They live lavishly and labor issues are not a source of stress for them. For most twenty-first century apparel executives, labor issues means impoverished countries will work for the least amount of money. The bulk of their labor force is non union. In fact technically it's not even their labor force. They have trickily worked through a system of contractors and sub contractors so that they can deny guilt (Ross 111). When public pressure mounts to improve wages and conditions, the executives can say they are trying hard and sending inspectors, but after all it's not really their workforce so they can't directly resolve the issues. Yet, the sub-contractors themselves can't afford to change things because their contracts with the big designer companies are usually low priced. If they attempt to negotiate a fairer price, the designers simply go to another contractor. ([www.sweatshopwatch.org](http://www.sweatshopwatch.org)).

At the N.S. Mart factory which is another Disney subcontractor, Kernaghan recorded some more testimony. "The workers told us the plant is hot, dusty, and poorly lit. Some complained about having trouble with their eyesight and respiratory problems" (Ross 98). Sexual abuse is rampant. One worker said a manager named Hillarie is the worst, "you either give in to him or you are fired" (Ross 98). Every worker Kernaghan talked to readily testified to being short changed on his pay. (Ross 98). A mother who had three kids said all

**LIDIA ANNA VIGYÁZÓ** Untitled in Brno  
digital photograph, 2005



her children were sick, and she was unable to afford the medicine to cure them (Ross 97). Their toilet was a hole in the ground shared with ten other families (Ross 97). No wonder her children were ill; there was bacteria and germs everywhere. Her children were weak; they often went days without dinner. Instead of eating they would just go to sleep.

After the CEOs drastically cut production costs, they continued to mark up the shoes and their companies' profits skyrocketed (Ross 26). These CEOs have taken their increased profits and reinvested them into paying celebrities like Michael Jordan, millions of dollars to endorse their products. Celebrity investments makes their products even more marketable. In 1992 Michael Jordan earned more than Nike's entire Indonesian workforce combined (Ross 9). Maybe from a business perspective the CEOs deserve a five hundred percent pay raise, but they have ruined the lives of almost every decent hard working American and many foreign workers in the process. These executives look at the charts, steep line graphs, and see record profits, but they don't see what was lost to make them. These successful soft lines executives (as shoes and clothes are referred to at Sears) have ignored all casualties to achieve their goal.

I continue my day at Sears. I just got off my half hour lunch break where I had a sandwich. It was pretty good. As I go back to the warehouse to retrieve some shoes, I realize that the warehouse is the closest I will get to a sweatshop. It is pretty dark and dusty. The ladders are a little rickety, and I'm always a little nervous climbing to the top of them. My imagination is a gigantic stretch from what a real sweatshop is like, something I hopefully will never experience. I finish my day a little tired, but happy and confident that more money, and the correct amount, will be in my bank account soon.

#### SOURCES

Ross, Andrew. No Sweat. New York: Verso, 1997.  
Sweatshop Watch. Sweatshop Watch. 7 September 2005.  
<<http://www.sweatshopwatch.org>>



**COLOPHON**

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